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Security Council

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Monday, 25 September 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Alemu	(Ethiopia)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Zambrana
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Fesko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/783)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/783)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Netherlands, Pakistan and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Guillaume Dabouis, Head of the Political Section of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/783, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: As we reach the third anniversary of the National Unity Government, I see progress, challenges that are still daunting, and new opportunities for political engagement for peace.

First, I would like to focus on some areas where progress on key reforms has occurred. This has been achieved despite ongoing security challenges. If those reforms can be consolidated and sustained, they will significantly strengthen the foundation for a more self-reliant Afghan State. The good working relationship between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah has greatly enabled the reform process.

The efforts of the Government to address corruption have begun to bear results after many years during which the debilitating issue was ignored. The major effort has been led by the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre, which is increasingly tackling complex cases involving high-level officials. The Centre has completed 21 cases and 14 appeals, enabling it to put a dent in the long-standing problem of impunity for Government corruption.

On 5 October, exactly one year after the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, senior officials will convene in Kabul to review progress made on the Brussels commitments. In that meeting of senior officials, the Afghan Government will need to demonstrate to the donors, including their taxpayers, and to Afghan citizens that the reform and development programmes are translating into real improvements in the well-being of all Afghans. I was encouraged, during the intensive preparations for the meeting, by the active engagement of all Afghan and international partners. International partners also need to demonstrate their clear commitment, and I very much count on the highest level of participation from Council members' respective capitals.

There has also been progress on the organization of parliamentary and district council elections scheduled for next July. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) has completed its assessment of polling stations, reportedly reaching more than 90 per cent of districts. The next step will be voter registration. These two processes will lay the foundation for what will be the most important electoral reforms since 2001 — the establishment of polling station-specific voter lists and the completion of a viable voter registry.

It is imperative that we hold the elections according to the plan. Timely elections will enhance the credibility of the political system and institutions. Many stakeholders, however, remain skeptical that credible elections will be held on time. The IEC needs to further increase its public outreach to demonstrate greater transparency and greater urgency in its electoral preparations. Many Afghan politicians and citizens across the country have told me repeatedly that the country could not endure another election like that of 2014. The electoral commissioners and their staff have inherited a huge responsibility, but the elections are not

the responsibility of the IEC alone. The independence of the electoral management bodies must be respected, and the Government must do everything possible to secure the elections. The international community must provide financial and technical support, but the IEC is in the lead and time is passing quickly.

The announcement of the electoral date has prompted the creation of new political coalitions, some of which are highly critical of the Government. Due to the fact that democracies require responsible oppositions, that may be seen as a constructive development. Many of these groups are crossing ethnic lines in a way that we have not seen before and building national coalitions. A risk, however, is that some might orient their activities towards actions that destabilize the constitutional order, promote ethnic and geographical divisions, or seek to undermine the State. The need to avoid that risk has been a constant element in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's (UNAMA) outreach to all political actors.

The security situation continues to be a major concern. The Secretary-General's report (S/2017/783) describes the main security trends in some detail. With the persistence of the Islamic State, also known as Da'esh, in the east of the country, and some reports of new Da'esh activity in the north, as well as in Kabul itself, the situation has become more complex. The human cost of that violence is high, disproportionately impacting women and children.

Current Afghan security planning foresees that Afghan forces will reach sufficient strength to reverse recent Taliban gains by 2020. The Taliban, meanwhile, continues to resist appeals to negotiate with the Afghan Government. At the current rate of death due to conflict, tens of thousands more Afghans will have been killed by 2020.

In the midst of this human tragedy, all sides acknowledge that there is no military solution to the conflict. The costs, including the human cost of the ongoing conflict, raise the urgency of the peace process. Frankly, the efforts of the past few years have led to little progress. We are, however, seeing renewed interest and efforts towards political engagements for peace. The announcement in August by the United States Administration of a continuing, conditions-based commitment to Afghanistan has removed some uncertainties. Some countries of the region and key countries are actively seeking to foster and promote regional engagements for peace.

We are all aware that preparations leading to a peace process are complex and require patience and time. Such efforts must be pragmatic and flexible, yet principled so as to ensure an inclusive political process to define the country's future. That can occur only when all relevant parties to the conflict communicate with each other to identify the contours of a mutual settlement. On that basis, confidence can be built and a process can be structured. The process must allow for the strategic interests of the countries of the region to be taken into consideration and built on a regional consensus.

I am convinced that a political settlement is possible. We should not let another fighting season begin without progress towards substantive negotiations. Opportunities will be lost, with the price paid in thousands of Afghan lives and at tremendous financial cost. I appeal to the countries of the region to conduct a profound reassessment of their strategic interest and to renew work towards a viable peace process, leading to an Afghan-owned solution to the conflict. If requested, the United Nations stands ready to assist all parties in achieving that goal.

Another potential cost of the conflict is backsliding on recent human rights gains. Violence against women and girls remains widespread. The criminalization of acts of violence against women, included in the legislative decree, remains to be approved by Parliament. The ongoing involvement of children in armed conflict remains a major problem. On a positive note, I welcome the Government's formal endorsement of the national policy on civilian casualty prevention and mitigation. I now call on the Government to implement the national policy through a structured action plan. I am encouraged by Afghanistan's candidacy for the Human Rights Council, and hope that it will be used to consolidate human rights progress in Afghanistan.

Allow me to turn to the Secretary-General's strategic review of UNAMA, carried out at the request of the Security Council. That undertaking provided us with a renewed opportunity to think more profoundly about our role, especially the centrality of the search for peace. We look forward to the Security Council's review of the Secretary-General's recommendations. Furthermore, the entire United Nations family in Afghanistan, as requested by President Ghani, is developing an innovative strategy to deliver its

development assistance as one and in full alignment with the Government's priorities. President Ghani welcomed our proposal, and we are now working ever more closely with his Office and key parts of the Government to put things into place swiftly.

The recommendations of the strategic review will entail significant cuts to the Mission. We will implement our mandate with greater focus and with a streamlined structure. In the past two months, I have visited 8 of our 12 field offices and met Government officials, civil society and United Nations staff. These visits made it clear that the presence of the United Nations is seen as a great benefit to Afghanistan and its people. I am confident that UNAMA will remain well positioned to deliver on its strategic tasks and serve the needs of the Afghan people.

In closing, I emphasize how important it is for Afghan leaders to deliver and demonstrate concrete achievements. Progress must be made in less than four years to make the best use of the Warsaw and Brussels commitments. Afghanistan must demonstrate to its donors that it has taken not just steps, but strides towards self-sufficiency. It is my hope that Afghanistan will soon not be perceived as a source of global security threats, but as a destination for trade and investment.

The President: I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan.

Mr. Rabbani (Afghanistan): Let me begin by thanking Ethiopia for convening today's debate on the situation in Afghanistan.

I am also delighted that Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto is here with us today. I thank Ambassador Yamamoto for his briefing, but more specifically for his dedicated efforts as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

I am pleased to address the Security Council for the first time as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan. This is a fitting opportunity to convey my appreciation for the Security Council's support and attention to the situation in my country, since the start of its journey towards a new Afghanistan in 2001. The people of Afghanistan look to the Council with high expectations as the guardian of international peace and security. Amid all of the challenges, Afghans are hopeful that the international community, the United Nations and the Council, in particular, will respond appropriately to help them achieve what has long eluded them — their right to live normal and dignified lives, in peace and security.

The time has come for the international community to take a fresh look at its engagement in Afghanistan. As President Ghani stated in his address to the General Assembly last week,

> "For too long, the conflict in Afghanistan has been viewed through the prism of civil war; but the war is not within our soil, it is over our soil" (*A/72/PV.6*).

The scourge of terrorism and violent extremism that affects Afghanistan is the product of a long-standing policy by a neighbouring State to keep Afghanistan unstable. It has menaced Afghanistan for several decades now, with its roots located in terrorist sanctuaries and safe havens outside of my country.

A bigger picture of the security situation reveals that our security forces are engaged in a comprehensive fight against the elements of more than 20 internationally recognized terrorist organizations. Thanks to the dedicated support of our international partners, our security forces are leading that fight more efficiently and with great valour and courage.

The Taliban is suffering major setbacks in manpower and morale and failing to hold ground over any territory. That is why its modus operandi draws mainly on suicide bombings and other unconventional criminal attacks on our people, infrastructure, public figures, mosques and international humanitarian personnel. Such barbarity constitutes crimes against humanity — the most recent being the massacre committed jointly by the Taliban and Da'esh in Mirza Olang village in Sari Pul province and the attacks on mosques in Kabul and Herat provinces.

I also wish to highlight that the exaggerated claims of Taliban control over some percentage of territory is being used as psychological warfare. Our security forces have the upper hand against terrorist and extremist groups throughout the country. That trend will continue in a positive trajectory with sustained assistance from international partners to further strengthen the capabilities of our national security forces and improve service delivery for our people.

We in Afghanistan have long called for an international focus that would address the fundamental sources of insecurity in our country. We are pleased that, as of late, there is a growing recognition of that imperative in the international community. The new dynamic presents an unprecedented opportunity, which must be seized. In that regard, I can say with confidence that the new strategy of the United States for South Asia has generated new hope among our people across the country. Afghans from all walks of life are looking to the future with renewed optimism that finally the threats of terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan and the wider region will be tackled appropriately.

In that connection, we welcome the fact that the new strategy recognizes the critical need to address the lingering problem of terrorist safe havens and sanctuaries in our region, and for more determined efforts to end the political, logistical and financial support enjoyed by terrorist groups. Furthermore, the strategy's conditions-based approach has addressed some uncertainties by reinforcing the right message that the international community's engagement will endure until Afghanistan becomes stable and secure.

We urge all partners in our region and beyond to recognize what is at stake. We now have a chance to fundamentally change the status quo for our common benefit. The support of the region, in that regard, will be of paramount importance. Collectively, we should seize this opportunity to strengthen consensus and partnership, in a spirit of cooperation to buttress Afghanistan's rightful status as an asset and platform of cordiality for all.

Despite being on the receiving end of provocative actions, including continuous violations across the Durand Line, Afghanistan has maintained a principled position in seeking to resolve differences through dialogue, diplomacy and peaceful means. This is particularly true in the case of our relations with Pakistan, which, unfortunately, has so far failed to respond positively, at its own cost, particularly in relation to its global reputation and standing.

Recently, we presented Pakistan with yet another opportunity to engage in comprehensive State-to-State discourse on peace, security and prosperity. This time around, we hope that we will see constructive engagement instead of plausible deniability and attempts to change the narrative. Even if embraced late, an opportunity seized is nevertheless better than one lost. There are various existing initiatives in which productive talks could take place. By the same token, we will spare no effort whatsoever in the defence of our country, people, territorial integrity and national sovereignty.

Ending violence means ensuring the security and well-being of our citizens. The Government of Afghanistan has gone to great lengths to secure sustained and durable peace for our people. The prospect of peace with the Taliban is dependent on genuine and constructive regional engagement in support of an Afghan-led process. In that regard, we believe that a paradigm shift could profoundly impact peace efforts with the Taliban in a positive way. A successful outcome, modelled on the agreement being implemented with another armed opposition group can be possible. We believe that the international community should take the necessary measures to achieve that aim.

Democratic institutions, values and principles provide the foundation for all progress made over the past 17 years in Afghanistan. We believe that a democratic society in which people are able to express their ideas, grievances and aspirations is not just a privilege, but also an imperative for social stability. The consolidation of democracy and institution-building will remain a priority of the National Unity Government. Our people are already anticipating the upcoming parliamentary and district council elections next year. The transparency, inclusivity and credibility of the polls will be crucial for our overall political stability.

In the area of reform, we are standing by our commitment to ensuring more accountable and effective institutions. A number of senior-level officials have been prosecuted and held to account for violating the rule of law. These cases have reaffirmed our promise to root out corruption in all its forms, and enhance public confidence in our reform commitments. This effort will continue with priority, and we look forward to highlighting recent achievements in this area at the upcoming senior officials meeting in Kabul to review reform commitments made in Brussels.

We consider the strategic review of the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan to be an essential initiative for ensuring an adjusted United Nations role that is more responsive to the current needs of the Afghan people and better aligned with our national priority programmes. We are pleased that the imperative of a One United Nations model

concerning the delivery of development assistance has been recognized. We hope to have, by the end of this year, an outcome that will enable the United Nations to deliver on its tasks more efficiently.

Our stabilization endeavour is based on an effort for simultaneous progress in the security, social and development spheres. Despite our challenges, we are making steady progress in protecting and upholding the rights of all of our citizens, especially women, girls and children. Our resolve in this important area is reflected in our candidacy to the Human Rights Council. For us, a commitment to human rights means enabling people to live in peace and security, achieve success and meet their aspirations. Above all, it means enabling people to live in honour and dignity.

These are ideals to which we are firmly committed. Our membership in the Human Rights Council will have many benefits. It will enable us to consolidate human rights gains at home. It will also enable us to be a voice for victims of terrorism and the dozens of countries that are in conflict and post-conflict situations. We kindly urge all United Nations Member States to support our candidacy.

In conclusion, let me convey the deep appreciation of Afghanistan to the Security Council and the international community for all that they have done and continue to do in support of Afghanistan's security and stability. We stand at the crossroad of our shared endeavour. As we approach the new year 2018, it is imperative that all of us seize the opportunity before us, brought about by the new spirit of the international community's engagement in my country.

The President: I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I would like to begin by welcoming His Excellency Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani to the Council, and I appreciate his statement. I would also like to thank Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing.

We are pleased to have seen some progress in Afghanistan on electoral preparations and related assessments, including the announcement of parliamentary and district council elections for 7 July 2018. At the same time, Afghanistan continues to face profound and numerous challenges. The seriousness of the situation in Afghanistan warrants enhanced performance by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in support of the efforts of the National Unity Government towards peace and stability. The Afghan people and the world also look to the United Nations for vital support for the country's development and institution-building.

With this in mind, we welcome the Secretary-General's strategic review as a useful guide for the Council's deliberations. The Council now needs to undertake serious discussions on how to incorporate these recommendations into UNAMA's mandate. That would be an excellent opportunity to adapt UNAMA's mandate to current realities on the ground. As the lead country in the Council on Afghanistan, Japan looks forward to an intensive and interactive discussion among Council members on these and related issues.

As the Secretary-General has noted in his report (S/2017/783), there was no major progress on the peace process during the current reporting period. Japan therefore takes note of the expanded role envisioned for UNAMA as an impartial mediator for the peace process. The United Nations can make a major contribution in this area, but the National Unity Government and regional actors must work to create an environment conducive to making reconciliation possible.

We are aware of various regional and international initiatives in support of the peace process that are currently being discussed. We were encouraged by bilateral discussions between the leaders of Pakistan and Afghanistan in June to build regional confidence. We hope that these and other initiatives will yield substantive and positive results, with the participation of all key countries.

Above all, the peace and reconciliation process must be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, putting the interests of the Afghan people first. The strategic review's proposal for United Nations support to greater unity and cohesion within the National Unity Government is therefore particularly important. The Secretary-General has noted some recent improvements in achieving consensus, but much more is needed. As Japan has noted in previous briefings, the Afghan people urgently require their Government to overcome factional rivalries to meet the country's pressing security and development neds. It is essential that credible parliamentary and district council elections be held as currently scheduled and under secure conditions.

In this vein, I would also like to underline the importance of efforts to improve security in the country.

The Council and UNAMA have issued countless press statements condemning the horrifying attacks on civilians. The unfortunate reduction of diplomatic and development actors in Afghanistan following the 31 May terrorist attack was perhaps inevitable, but it has had a negative impact on both international efforts and the people of Afghanistan. We look forward to enhanced security and a restored international presence as soon as possible.

We have much work ahead on Afghanistan. The full implementation of resolution 2344 (2017) will be vital, as will the continued and productive engagement of the international community and all stakeholders. Japan reiterates its commitment to supporting Afghanistan and to the enhanced performance of UNAMA.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing. We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/696) on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and it is good to have Foreign Minister Rabbani with us this afternoon.

It has been 16 years since the United States and the international community took action in Afghanistan. Despite all our efforts, the human cost of the conflict remains staggering. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan documented over 5,200 civilian casualties in just the first half of this year. Over 1,600 of these were fatalities, and tragically, 30 per cent of these deaths were children.

After so many years and so much American blood and treasure spent, it is useful to recite these statistics. But however war-weary we are, it is the Afghan people, of course, who pay the highest price for the conflict there. Anti-Government forces are responsible for the large majority of civilian casualties. Their actions are too often indiscriminate and disproportionate. They keep old grievances fresh and create new ones with each passing day.

We are and we should be impatient with this war. In his speech outlining a new strategy for the United States in South Asia, President Trump said that his first instinct was to pull out of Afghanistan, but after studying the issue he concluded that the men and women who have sacrificed so much in that conflict deserve to have their sacrifice honoured with victory. Turning our backs on Afghanistan would dishonour their memory by leaving the world in an even more dangerous place than when the conflict began.

That is why we welcome the results of the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. This is a timely moment for the United Nations to take a step back and to ensure that its Mission in Afghanistan is able to continue its role in promoting peace and prosperity. United Nations support for electoral reforms, peace and reconciliation, human rights and women's issues will continue to be critical in the years ahead. We look forward to continuing to work with Special Representative Yamamoto and his team in support of these shared goals.

The United States new South Asia strategy is also well timed and makes clear that, ultimately, the United States and the United Nations share the same overarching goal in Afghanistan — a durable political settlement that leads to lasting peace. The United States will continue to support the Afghan Government and security forces in their fight against the Taliban and in their efforts to combat Al-Qaida, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and other extremist groups. We do not seek a permanent military presence in Afghanistan, but we are prepared to assist Afghan forces for as long as it takes to ensure that terrorists are never again able to exploit Afghanistan's territory as a safe haven.

Our message to the Taliban and their supporters is clear — they cannot win on the battlefield. The only path to peace is through negotiations. They must abandon violence, cut ties with international terrorism and accept the Afghan constitution. We will continue to support and encourage the immediate launch of peace talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, with no preconditions. We will provide support, but the Unites States is committed to an Afghan-owned political process to settle the conflict in Afghanistan. The path towards a negotiated settlement is available. The Taliban must choose to take that path.

Afghanistan's neighbours can also help. A central tenet of our new South Asia strategy is the recognition that Afghanistan's security and stability are tied to the security and stability of the entire region. We call on all regional Governments to support the Afghan Government and to do what they can to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. Critically, we also call upon Afghanistan's neighbours and all countries of the region to unconditionally cease their support for armed and violent extremist groups.

Finally, we support Council representatives travelling to Afghanistan in the coming months to assess

the political and security environment there. Given the continuing toll of the conflict and Afghanistan's importance to peace and security in Central Asia, it is critical that we see this conflict through the eyes of those living it every day. We are all impatient to end the conflict in Afghanistan, but our impatience can be an asset if it is informed by the suffering of the Afghan people and tempered by the need to never again allow terrorists a safe haven in Afghanistan.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his briefing and for all his ongoing work. I especially welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, Mr. Salahuddin Rabani, for attending this afternoon's meeting. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/783), which highlights the complex situation in the country, and for his special report (S/2017/696)on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Uruguay recognizes the work done by the Special Envoy and the tireless dedication of all the staff of the Mission.

Uruguay reaffirms its support for the Government of Afghanistan and encourages it to pursue its efforts to achieve a lasting peace based on the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity. It is critical to strengthen democratic institutions to achieve the stability of the country. In that regard, I highlight the progress made in the electoral process and the announcement of the legislative and district council elections to be held in mid-July next year.

The progress made by the Afghan Government in its programme of priority reforms, such as the fights against corruption and impunity, are encouraging. By the same token, the activities of the Government and its partners to address violence against women and girls and the increased representation of women in the High Peace Council are all positive developments.

Nevertheless, we are concerned by the lack of progress between the Government and the Taliban towards a peace process. There is no military solution to this conflict. Peace can be achieved only through dialogue and direct negotiations. The best and most effective way of weakening the terrorists will be through dialogue, unity and reconciliation among Afghanis. It is therefore essential that the maximum efforts be made to establish talks between the Government and the Taliban. Without the firm resolve of all parties, there can be no end to this protracted conflict.

The support of the United Nations and the international community for the National Unity Government of Afghanistan remains a critical element in efforts to address the major political, economic and security challenges facing the country in its efforts to build a lasting peace. We wish in that regard to express our appreciation for the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation and the interest shown by Afghanistan's partners in pursuing this initiative.

Turning to UNAMA, we welcome the initiative of cooperating with local radio stations in provinces, such as Kandahar and Kunar, to set up platforms for dialogue among communities in which tribal leaders, faith leaders, provincial authorities and women will participate in fostering dialogue and mediating between rival groups.

Despite all the efforts made to stabilize and secure the country, conditions remain unstable and have deteriorated even further, with serious impact on civilians, who are already in a difficult situation and suffering the dire consequences of the conflict. Uruguay condemns the terrorist attacks on mosques in the cities of Herat and Kabul in August, resulting inthe deaths of dozens of civilians as they prayed. Uruguay strongly condemns those and all other terrorist attacks. Unfortunately, fighting continues and is exacting a heavy toll in civilian casualties, particularly among innocent women and children. Thousands of Afghans have been forcibly displaced and to flee the violence in their communities. According to the Secretary-General's report, humanitarian access, workers and health facilities continue to be severely affected.

Uruguay calls on all parties to the conflict to respect humanitarian principles, human rights and international humanitarian law. We also reiterate our call for full compliance with resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of the wounded and sick and medical facilities and personnel. Attacks on hospitals and medical personnel violate international humanitarian law and may constitute war crimes. These crimes should not remain unpunished and the perpetrators must be held accountable for their actions. Uruguay reiterates its appreciation to all humanitarian workers who have been striving in extremely difficult conditions to provide care to the Afghan people, and who continue to fall victim to bloody attacks.

In conclusion, echoing Mr. Yamamoto's simile of a few days ago, the support of all and at every level, through understanding and ownership, is needed to continue weaving this intricate tapestry.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his analysis of the evolving circumstances in Afghanistan. And, of course, we listened carefully to the statement by Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. We agree with many of the views expressed in the most recent quarterly report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/783), and for our part would like to make the following comments:

We are concerned about the deteriorating military situation and increasing terrorist activity in Afghanistan. We continue to be particularly worried about the activities of the Afghan wing of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and its attempt to establish itself in the northern provinces. According to our estimates, the group currently has an impressive total of more than 7,000 fighters in the country. ISIL's expansionist drive represents a real threat to the security of our friends in Central Asia and to the southern regions of Russia. Nor can we ignore the problem of the unidentified helicopters in northern Afghanistan that have been observed providing assistance to ISIL fighters. This situation must be thoroughly investigated and any such covert activity stopped immediately.

The drug problem in Afghanistan is getting worse. We are concerned about the continuing increase in the acreage used for drugs and the rise in their production. Narco-dollars now account for a considerable part of terrorists' income — as much as 35 or 40 per cent — in Afghanistan. We therefore want international efforts to combat the Afghan drug trade to be enhanced. We believe there is good potential for strengthening cooperation in that regard between Afghanistan and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Regrettably, we have been compelled to conclude that the protracted and major presence in Afghanistan of military contingents from the United States and NATO has not helped to stabilize the military and political situation. We also have questions about their intention to shift the focus of their tactics to using force to put pressure on the armed opposition and individual countries in the region. As we know, that approach has not had positive results in the past and has served only to escalate the conflict.

We firmly believe that at this stage the emphasis should be on negotiation efforts, which will enable us to launch the national reconciliation process as soon as possible. Needless to say, it is Kabul that should play the principal role in that process, but the international partners providing external support for it should cooperate on an equal basis and take into account the national interests of every country in the region, without exception. Unfortunately, despite the presence of numerous international entities in this area, we have failed to achieve the main goal of involving the Taliban in peace negotiations. In that context, we should consider the Moscow format for consultations on Afghanistan — in which almost all the interested parties, including the Central Asian States, are participating — as the optimal platform for substantive talks on national reconciliation and establishing a direct dialogue between Kabul and the Taliban. We believe the format is fully in line with the requirements.

We continue to believe that UNAMA plays an important role in coordinating international assistance to Afghanistan, and we took note of the Secretary-General's special report on the strategic review of its mandate (S/2017/696). However, we should note the world's growing realization of the importance of the regional context in settling the Afghan crisis, and therefore of the potential of well-established entities in the area, especially the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). We hope to see success through the revived mechanism of the SCO Afghanistan Contact Group, whose first meeting is scheduled for 11 October.

Mr. Moustafa (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and to welcome His Excellency Mr. Rabbani, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, and thank him for his valuable briefing.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2017/696) on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), conducted to evaluate the Mission's operations, activities and effectiveness, shows the important role that the United Nations plays in Afghanistan.

In the light of the unprecedented increase this year in security incidents and terrorist attacks by the Taliban, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and other terrorist organizations, it appears that the international and national efforts have not been enough to eliminate these organizations. What is needed is an integrated strategy on the political, security, economic and social fronts that is owned by the Afghan Government and supported by its neighbours and international partners, led by the United Nations. Based on the traditional ties that connect Egypt and Afghanistan and the mutual influence and the close links between the security and political conditions in Central Asia and the Middle East, we reaffirm our support to the Afghan Government, its war on terrorism and its efforts to extend its control and sovereignty throughout its territory. We welcome the arrangements and preparations for conducting the elections scheduled for the middle of next year. We also support international and regional efforts aimed at supporting the country's socioeconomic development, including the resettlement and rehabilitation of internally displaced persons and refugees.

The drug trade continues to be the main source of funding for the arms trade in Afghanistan, and is therefore the most dangerous source of support for extremist groups and terrorist organizations, whether through money or weapons. The intertwined interests and ties between organized criminal networks and terrorists embody the challenges facing Afghanistan and indeed the entire region of Central Asia. It is therefore important to intensify and coordinate the international and regional efforts with those of the Afghan Government with a view to combating drug trafficking in the context of the fight against terrorism. In that regard, we would like to highlight the potentially valuable role to be played by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the relevant regional organizations.

The recommendations in the strategic review of UNAMA, as well as the statements by Mr. Rabbani and Mr. Yamamoto, reflect the importance of coming up with a new vision in the search for a comprehensive peace. Those recommendations and approaches show the urgent need to build and sustain peace, with the United Nations working together with Afghanistan in the upcoming period. It is therefore important to combine the fundamental elements of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan — political, economic, social and institutional — with implementation geared towards a comprehensive approach to overcome the challenges that currently exist in Afghanistan, especially given the problem of the country's reliance on grants from the international community, which constitute over 60 per cent of the Government's budget. We believe that the main composition of UNAMA over the next period must be based on resources and skills that are primarily directed towards capacity-building in Afghan institutions to improve the State's ability to undertake its responsibilities, maintain security, create job opportunities, revitalize the national economy and offer basic services to the Afghan people. That objective requires close coordination and cooperation among UNAMA, the various United Nations components that are present and the development sector in Afghanistan.

In line with what I have said here, through its Agency of Partnership for Development to offering, Egypt is committedto providing advanced specialized training courses to Afghan security and police personnel. In addition, Egypt has sent Arabic language experts to the University of Kabul and has accorded particular focus to the areas of justice, culture, health care and nursing, agriculture and irrigation and the banking sector. Egypt continues to offer humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. We call upon the international community to stand behind Afghanistan and understand that the country's stability is the key to stability in Southern and Central Asia. That is the message that Egypt took great care to emphasize during its participation last week in the meetings of senior officials of the Heart of Asia Process, which were held on the sidelines of the General Assembly high-level segment.

We believe that UNAMA can play a pivotal role in continuing to mobilize the international community and help it focus on the priorities of establishing and sustaining peace and eliminating the causes of instability. Instability cannot become Afghanistan's inevitable destiny.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the convening of this open meeting on Afghanistan. China also welcomes the presence of His Excellency Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, at the meeting. We also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing.

Peace and stability in Afghanistan have a direct bearing on the fundamental interests of the Afghan people, as well as on regional security, stability, development and prosperity. China applauds the efforts of the Afghan Government in safeguarding national stability, facilitating national reconciliation and promoting economic development. China underscores the important role that neighbouring and regional countries playon the question of Afghanistan. Afghanistan continues to face a number of political, economic and security challenges. In order to help Afghanistan overcome such challenges, the international community should continue to provide firm support in the following areas.

First, maintaining peace and stability constitutes the basis of Afghanistan's reconstruction and economic development. The international community should continue to support the capacity of the Afghan national security forces and contribute to the country's ability to defend itself so that Afghanistan can effectively respond to threats, such as terrorism, transnational organized crime and drug trafficking. We support an active role by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and other actors in helping Afghanistan fight terrorism. The international community should step up its coordination and cooperation in combating terrorist elements in Afghanistan.

Secondly, political dialogue is the only viable solution for the question of Afghanistan. Actors in Afghanistan should put the country's long-term interests and their people's welfare first and actively participate in the reconciliation process. The international community should continue to promote the realization of a broad, inclusive political settlement that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. Furthermore, the international community should engage all Afghan parties concerned for the early launch of peace talks. We welcome the assistance provided by relevant regional countries and mechanisms.

Thirdly, strengthening governance is an important guarantee for Afghanistan's peace and reconstruction process. Ultimately, Afghan affairs should be handled by the Afghan people themselves. All political actors in Afghanistan must achieve unity and resolve their differences through dialogue and consultations. The international community must fully respect the right of the Afghan people to independently choose their political system and development path. Moreover, on the basis of Afghanistan's national development strategy and actual needs, the international community should provide targeted assistance to the Afghan Government to improve its capacity to govern.

Fourthly, integration into regional development constitutes an important path towards the achievement of peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan. The international community must make good on its pledges to provide assistance and support Afghanistan in promoting economic and social development. With its unique resources and geographical advantages, Afghanistan enjoys great prospects for regional cooperation efforts. Resolution 2344 (2017) and the relevant General Assembly resolutions stipulate that all parties must create a community of a common future in the spirit of cooperation and principle of win-win, and promote the economic development of Afghanistan and regional cooperation through the Belt and Road Initiative.

China has taken note of the Secretary-General's special report (S/2017/696) on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), officially submitted in August pursuant to resolution 2344 (2017). We hope that, through the review, the United Nations will be able to further optimize and re-prioritize the tasks of the Mission in accordance with the current situation, maximize the allocation of resources, improve the management processes and enhance the Mission's ability to deal with complex situations. China commends the work carried out by UNAMA and hopes that the Mission will respect the sovereignty, leading role and ownership of Afghanistan, continue to facilitate the political reconciliation process and promote the economic development of the country. Furthermore, China hopes that UNAMA will play a positive role in helping Afghanistan to restore stability, promote national reconciliation, improve governance and promote economic development.

China will continue to support the work of UNAMA. China has always played a constructive role in promoting the reconciliation process in Afghanistan. During a recent visit to Afghanistan and Pakistan by Minister for Foreign Affairs Wang Yi, the three countries agreed to establish a trilateral foreign ministers' dialogue mechanism, support the relaunch of the Afghanistan-Pakistan-China-United States Quadrilateral Coordination Group and the reactivatation of the International Shanghai Cooperation Organization Afghanistan Contact Group. Afghanistan and Pakistan also agreed to establish a

bilateral crisis-management mechanism. China will continue to support Afghanistan's security capacity-building as well as the country's efforts to promote economic and social development. China stands ready to work together with the international community for the early realization of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing today. At the outset, I want to express my gratitude and that of my Government for the work that he and his team are doing in extremely challenging circumstances. I also thank Foreign Minister Rabbani for his intervention today.

As both Mr. Rabbani and Mr. Tadamichi made clear, we simply cannot afford to lose sight of Afghanistan. Despite years of progress, Afghanistan continues to face tough security and development challenges, while the human cost after years of fighting and violence only continues to grow. Our work is therefore not done, and it is clear that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) still has a vital part play.

Just as Afghanistan today is not the same as it was 10 years ago, it is right that UNAMA changes too, to fit the current realities on the ground. We therefore welcome the review into how the Mission can best support Afghanistan in a way that aligns with the Government's own priorities. We share much of the analysis in the strategic review, with its focus on streamlining the work of the Mission towards a targeted set of outcomes. The report (S/2017/696) contains a number of recommendations that should strengthen its work. The key thing now is implementation.

We will continue our close work with UNAMA on donor coordination, the rule of law, anti-corruption efforts and support for human rights, especially womens' rights. We welcome the recognition of the importance of the national civilian presence offered by UNAMA's network of field officers. The United Kingdom strongly supports the continued national presence. Those officers are an important symbol to local communities. They will also have a role to play in delivering successful elections in 2018 and 2019, and can make a contribution to underpinning local peace negotiations in the future.

The report sets out three strategic priorities corresponding to support for political stability, peace, and economic and social development. We believe that putting greater focus on support for an Afghan-led peace process is the right way forward. Only by establishing a credible peace process can Afghanistan move forward. We all have a role to play in that, including the United Nations. We very much hope, therefore, that members of the Security Council can agree to adjust the mandate of UNAMA in order to incorporate those recommendations. That would ensure that UNAMA is better able to focus on the critical task of supporting the peace process. We look forward to discussing this matter with Council members in the weeks ahead.

Before concluding I want to say a word on the outcome of the United States-South Asia strategy review. The United Kingdom and United States are close partners in Afghanistan, and so we welcome the United States long-term commitment to the people and the Government there. Despite the challenges, which we have heard a lot about today, we agree that it is important that we continue to provide support on issues such as security, development and governance. That is crucial to building a stable Afghan State and to reducing the terrorist threat to us all.

It is in all our interests that Afghanistan become safer and more prosperous, that is why we announced our own troop increase in June and confirmed development support of up to $1 billion until 2020. We also welcomed the restated commitment that ultimately the only way to a political settlement will be through negotiations between the Afghan Government and the Taliban. That is why we encourage Foreign Minister Rabbani and his colleagues in the Government to take this opportunity to reach out to the Taliban to establish a credible peace process. We owe it to the people of Afghanistan, who have suffered so much during decades of violence, to do all that can be done to institute a peace process. It will be beholden on us all — within the Council, in the United Nations system more broadly and, of course, the Government of Afghanistan — to support such a peace process.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): We would like to align ourselves with the statement to be made later on behalf of the European Union. I should like to make a few points on behalf of Sweden.

Let me begin by thanking Special Representative Yamamoto for his excellent briefing today and for the work done by him and his team. We also very much appreciate the presence of Mr. Rabbani here today.

Impressive progress has been achieved over the past 15 years in consolidating Afghanistan's democratic institutions and protecting human rights and civil liberties for the Afghan people. At the same time, persistent high levels of violence remain a major concern. As highlighted by the Secretary-General, the increase in sectarian attacks is very troubling. Civilians in Afghanistan continue to disproportionately shoulder the burden of the conflict. The statistics suggest that their burden is not getting any lighter. The year 2016 saw record levels of civilian casualties in Afghanistan, including an increase in the number of women and children killed or injured. We have to try to stop this together, and we call on all sides to do their utmost to protect the civilian populations as a matter of priority.

Building peaceful and inclusive societies is not easy. It takes patience, courage and determination from all parties. A politically negotiated settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan is the only way to achieve sustainable peace. It is therefore imperative that both sides take steps urgently to engage in dialogue to reach a political settlement and end violence. Those with some influence over the Taliban have a special responsibility in that regard.

Regional tensions continue to undermine long-term stability and economic growth in Afghanistan. Sustained and constructive engagement by countries in the region will be essential for a long-term solution. All stakeholders, especially neighbouring countries, must assume their responsibilities and work together towards a sustainable peace. The Kabul process to foster a genuine peace and reconciliation should be supported, including by the United Nations and all other bodies.

We fully support the Government's efforts to put in place a reform process to ensure strong and independent institutions and a robust democratic process. We have high expectations of the Government's reform agenda and for its delivery. The upcoming elections are one key element of that effort. We welcome the fact that a date for district council and parliamentary elections has now been set. The United Nations has an important supportive role to play, but the main ownership and responsibility to ensure meaningful elections of course rests with the Afghan authorities.

Since 2002, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has played an essential role in support of the Afghan people. We welcome the UNAMA strategic review and its recommendations, in particular its important emphasis on conflict prevention and sustaining peace. That emphasis is an acknowledgement that the conflict in Afghanistan is not over. Despite our efforts, including the tireless work of UNAMA and the whole of the United Nations system, the country has not yet entered a post-conflict phase. Therefore, a continued focus on supporting peace efforts remains a key priority. With the new United States strategy, there is now an opportunity for enhanced diplomatic and political efforts.

Concrete measures must be taken to strengthen the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security. As recommended by the Secretary-General, UNAMA has an important role to play in supporting an inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process that includes women, in line with the Constitution. We further welcome the intention to relocate the Senior Gender Adviser to the Office of the Secretary-General's Special Representative, as outlined in the strategic review, and we appreciateUNAMA's integrated reporting on these issues.

In order to fulfil the important responsibility of the United Nations in Afghanistan, the UNAMA leadership and the United Nations country team should make full use of the review and fully implement its recommendations. They should do so in the spirit of the One United Nations initiative and the sustaining peace agenda by working in a coordinated fashion for peace, development, human rights and humanitarian assistance. Socioeconomic improvements and service delivery throughout the country continues to be critical to maintaining support and momentum for the peace process.

Sweden's support to the people of Afghanistan has remained firm for over three decades. In line with the Secretary-General's approach, we have adjusted our policy and our very concrete support to focus more on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, including through mediation training for Afghan women. I would like to assure Afghanistan's Minister for Foreign Minister Affairs that, as the Afghan people enter this next phase in efforts towards peace, they can count on my country's continued support for State- and peacebuilding efforts towards a prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I join earlier speakers in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing. I take

this opportunity to thank him and all members and personnel of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for their dedication in carrying out their duties under challenging circumstances. I also thank Foreign Minister Rabbani for his substantial briefing and wish him success in his efforts to bring peace and stability to his country.

The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/686) provides realistic assessments and important insights into the work of UNAMA and the United Nations country team in Afghanistan. More important, it contains constructive recommendations that are crucial to maximizing the potential of all the efforts and resources of the United Nations and the international community. Kazakhstan looks forward to the deliberations over, and eventual implementation of, those recommendations, which would enable us to then leverage the comparative advantages of the United Nations and the international community to support the reconstruction and redevelopment of Afghanistan.

On the political track, allow me to reiterate Kazakhstan's firm support for the reconciliation and reintegration efforts undertaken by the Government of Afghanistan. We also commend the Afghan Government's continuing commitment and efforts to address the increasing political, economic and security challenges faced by the country. We take those as strong testimony of Afghanistan's aspiration to achieve national unity and stability, which could contribute to regional stability.

Kazakhstan is also pleased to note the encouraging progress made on the electoral issue and the gain in its credibility, particularly expressed through the setting of 7 July 2018 as the date for legislative and local elections. We welcome their inclusive, transparent and participatory character.

We urge the Government to swiftly implement its progressive strategies, such as the four-year plan on security sector reform and many others in different dimensions, which, in our view, will further strengthen the capacity of their national institutions.

Kazakhstan reiterates that a peaceful political settlement is the only way to achieve sustainable peace and stability in the country. We remain hopeful that relevant talks will resume at the earliest convenience. It should be an Afghan-led and -owned process.

Despite some noteworthy developments, Kazakhstan remains concerned by the fragility and volatility of the security situation in the country. As reflected in the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/783), the conflict continued unabated throughout the country during the reporting period. Furthermore, the significant increase in violent incidents involving the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province affiliates and the Taliban have resulted in further hardship endured by the Afghan people, as well as the loss of innocent civilian lives. Kazakhstan strongly supports all regional and global initiatives, including the efforts of regional organizations to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan.

Kazakhstan commends the positive trends in the ongoing efforts to counter narcotics in Afghanistan. Countries in the region and regional organizations are actively engaged in facing the challenge. We also recognize important steps towards meeting and eventually adopting of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime-World Health Organization International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders. I am also pleased to state that, in the intersessional period, my country hosted a Precursor Case Meeting in Almaty in the framework of regional cooperation on counter-narcotics, held at the headquarters of Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre for combating the illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors.

Kazakhstan believes that at this stage it remains imperative for the United Nations and the international community to continue to lend their support, encouragement and assistance to Afghanistan through reconstruction and redevelopment efforts to rebuild the country. Their political and development activities should be in greater alignment with the priorities set by the Afghan Government. We are heartened to hear that the Afghan Government prioritizes the social and economic development of Afghanistan, with the broad involvement of international business in the implementation of concrete economic projects. The core of our efforts is to help Afghanistan set up its image as an attractive partner with great potential. Our Afghani brothers and sisters need joint projects, job creation and the facilitation of the development of communication and trade.

All Central Asian States are committed to the development of long-term cooperation with

Afghanistan and intraregional connectivity in the areas of infrastructure, transit and transport, energy and other fields, so as to contribute to Afghanistan's integration into our region's trade and economic cooperation as a new model of relations with this brotherly country.

My country therefore proposes a new approach, based on a security and development nexus. That approach is based on our assumption that economic development will create the prerequisites for a political settlement and a solution to security issues. We would like to stress once again that there can be no security without development, and no development without security.

The plight of children continues to be severely affected by the escalation of the conflict. Afghanistan has taken many commendable steps towards ensuring its national security forces are child-free. The Government is also promoting age-assessment guidelines that we hope will be widely implemented. However, Kazakhstan is alarmed that during the current reporting period the conflicts in Afghanistan recorded a high number of child casualties — with up to 50 boys reportedly recruited by Da'esh — and welcomes the joint efforts of UNAMA and UNICEF to address that challenge. Attacks on schools and educational personnel is also an alarming trend, as they prevent access to education and a return to normalcy. In that regard, we urge the Government to maintain its commitment to the full implementation of its action plans and road maps to that end, and prevent the recruitment and use of children.

Finally, Kazakhstan is pleased that UNAMA and the Government of Afghanistan have continued to maintain a close partnership between themselves and with other stakeholders, which is vital to ensuring sustainable peace and stability in the country. We hope that these will lead to a more productive and effective collaboration within the country, the United Nations system and the international community. Let me conclude by reaffirming Kazakhstan's sincere commitment to supporting the Afghan Government in its effort to achieve peace, security and stability.

Mr. Fesko (Ukraine): I thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing and express my appreciation for Foreign Minister Rabbani's presence and his remarks.

The overall picture as presented in the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/783) revives disconcerting feelings and causes renewed concern over the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security. We welcome the National Unity Government's firm commitment and steps taken to promote the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned inclusive peace process that would embrace, inter alia, factions of the Taliban demonstrating openness to negotiations. We also welcome the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in support of the Government's initiatives and its facilitation of local-level peacebuilding.

However, despite those efforts, no significant progress has been made in fostering negotiations. We recognize that the Independent Election Commission announced the date of the long-awaited parliamentary and local elections to be held in 2018, as well as presented sound proposals to guarantee the credibility of the electoral process through, inter alia, the use of voter verification procedures and the introduction of polling and results management technologies. Yet there is still no political decision on the implementation of those proposals.

It is praiseworthy that the Government took into serious consideration the fact that international financial support to Afghanistan, which is key for securing steady improvement of the economic and social situation in the country, depends upon the successful implementation of the anti-corruption and anti-drug policy. Since corruption has [illegible] facet of the country's life, resolute steps undertaken by the Anti-Corruption Justice Center in tackling such a complex problem are a welcome development. The implementation of those steps requires powerful impetus and, importantly, political commitment at every level of local and central Government.

We also commend the dedicated work of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission in promoting and monitoring human rights and the investigation of human rights abuses. In particular, we welcome the launch of a national inquiry on the protection of the rights of victims of armed conflict and terrorism. We call on the Government of Afghanistan to cooperate fully with the Commission in that regard, as well as in investigating abuses against women, children and human rights defenders.

The terrorism threat remains an uphill challenge in Afghanistan. Despite having been partially degraded by Afghan and international military operations, it remains increasingly diverse. Attempts by the Taliban to take

over a number of strategic areas and communication lines and destroy critical infrastructure, as well as their attacks on health-care facilities and their forced closure, should be considered as acts of terror. The Taliban's continued influence over regional Al-Qaida affiliates, whose fighters from the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region have integrated into the Taliban, which has led to an increase in its military capabilities, is extremely worrying. Attempts by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant to expand its presence in the north of the country are equally disturbing.

Against that backdrop, I would like to stress the need for concerted actions by Afghanistan's international partners to reduce terrorism activity, facilitate the safe return of refugees and promote the economic recovery of the country.

Although there can be no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan, a military dimension is vital. In that context, we welcome the recently announced new strategy of the United States for Afghanistan, as well as the commitments of other NATO member States, which ought to contribute to increasing the effectiveness of counter-terrorism efforts of the Afghan national security and defence forces.

Yet, without constructive dialogue from all regional actors and their practical engagement in eradicating terrorists' safe havens and depriving them of sources of financing, especially drug trafficking, all of those achievements will be irrelevant. Double-dealing should no longer be tolerated.

The United Nations plays a key role in efforts to make Afghanistan stable and prosperous. Given the current state of play, we need a strong UNAMA that is able to effectively deliver its mandated responsibilities. In that regard, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for providing us with the report (S/2017/696) on the strategic review of UNAMA and express our support for its swift implementation. Among the Mission's major tasks should be the provision of mediation services in support of the national reconciliation process, the promotion of reforms, good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law and support for humanitarian and development projects.

The upcoming 2018-2019 election cycle, along with the subsequent evolution of the political environment in the country, will also require UNAMA's special focus on the efficiency of all of its components, especially its field presences. Yet we fully agree with the Secretary-General that, while the situation on the ground remains increasingly insecure and fragile, the security of UNAMA personnel should certainly remain a priority.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Ukraine's strong support for UNAMA. Its activities in Afghanistan are vital for creating a sound foundation for peace, security and prosperity both in the country and in the wider region.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, first of all, to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his briefing and, through him, to pay tribute again to United Nations personnel working in difficult conditions in Afghanistan. I also warmly welcome the presence of Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, and I thank him for his intervention.

France associates itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union. I shall confine myself to four main points.

First, the continued increase in the level of violence and the resulting deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remain a major concern for France. As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/783) unfortunately reminds us, and as others have recalled here, the Afghan population remains the first victim of the conflict and women and children continue to pay the highest price. Afghan forces, whose commitment and courage I commend, are continuing with their operations and they have been making significant progress. However, armed confrontations and repeated terrorist attacks continue to destabilize the country as a whole. In that regard, France takes very seriously the establishment and proliferation of armed and terrorist groups in Afghanistan and in the region. France shares the determination of the Afghan authorities and our allies to fight terrorism and welcomes any decision that contributes to achieving that objective, in compliance with international law, such as the new strategy of the United States for Afghanistan and South-East Asia. In order to succeed, that counter-terrorism effort must also be supported by all countries in the region.

The humanitarian situation, which is already particularly fragile, has been aggravated by the conflict and the collapse of the economy. The massive return of refugees from Pakistan and Iran is a serious challenge for Afghan authorities. In that regard, France

encourages the Government of Afghanistan to continue its efforts to ensure equal treatment of all refugees and displaced persons and welcomes the remarkable actions taken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Secondly, the extremely volatile security and humanitarian environment makes the unity of the Afghan Government and its perseverance in reforms more important than ever. There is no alternative to Afghan cohesion and collective determination to deepen and consolidate Afghan democracy. The pursuit of ongoing reforms aimed at achieving a more effective Government that is more capable of serving the population must remain a priority. In particular, that applies in particular to electoral reform, where progress has been made. France particularly welcomes the announcement of the holding of legislative elections on 7 July 2018. Preparations undertaken by the Independent Election Commission must continue, along with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), in order to enable free and transparent elections as scheduled. Reforms in the fight against corruption and drug trafficking, which continue to fuel the Taliban's insurgency, must also be pursued with determination. In terms of human rights, the situation of women and children is still very precarious. It is essential that the Afghan authorities continue to mobilize efforts to fully implement their commitments to women's rights and the protection of children.

Thirdly, the stabilization of Afghanistan will require a negotiated political solution and national reconciliation. France hopes that the peace process can be resumed by Afghan actors as soon as possible, with the support of countries of the region and the international community. The sincere commitment and unambiguous support for peace by all Afghanistan's neighbours is essential. We call for renewed efforts and concrete commitments in that domain.

Against that backdrop — and this will be my fourth point — it is reassuring that we have the support of the United Nations and particularly of UNAMA, which has never been stronger. France thanks the Secretary-General and his team for their very serious work carried out in the context of UNAMA's strategic review. We support the recommendations made in the report (S/2017/696), which should make it possible to streamline its work. The proposal to refocus the work of the Mission is particularly welcome. Such refocusing will allow it to distribute its effort across four pillars: contributing to the establishment of peace in Afghanistan; facilitating the engagement of the countries of the region; moderating and supporting the dialogue between the Government and Afghan political forces; and coordinating among international donors.

Allow me to conclude by reiterating my country's full support for the Afghan Government and the work carried out by the United Nations in Afghanistan in the quest for lasting peace and safe and dignified lives for all people of the country.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statement that will be delivered by the observer of the European Union later this afternoon. I would nevertheless like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

First of all, we thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/696) and we strongly welcome the strategic review. We thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing and, like others, we wish to express our appreciation for the tireless efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) aimed at promoting peace and coordinating international community assistance in an extremely challenging environment.

Italy welcomes the presence of His Excellency Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan. I thank him for his briefing. It was the first of many, I hope.

We continue to witness an unending escalation of the intensity of the conflict in Afghanistan and the terrible consequences that it has brought, starting with severe casualties, particularly among those who are most vulnerable, such as women and children. Terrorists remain a grave and dangerous threat to the country's stability, as we have seen from the devastating and heinous attacks that have taken place in recent months.

This situation requires us to renew our collective support for the National Unity Government's efforts to bring peace and stability to the country. Faced with the relentless violence from the Taliban and from terrorist groups, the Afghan national security and defence forces continue to play a pivotal role in defending the substantial progress made in Afghanistan since 2001. We pay tribute to their courage and dedication.

Italy renews its active commitment to continuing to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces

in the framework of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission. But in order for lasting peace and security to be brought to the country, the solution must ultimately be a political one achieved through negotiations between the Government and armed opposition groups in the framework of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process that respects the country's Constitution. This process will require the full and concrete support of Afghanistan's partners. We therefore welcome the new United States strategy for the country, which confirms the intention to work towards achieving this ultimate outcome. We also welcome renewed United States commitment to the broader fight against terrorism. In that context, the role of regional actors will be crucial. We need genuine and constructive cooperation from all regional stakeholders in a common and resolute fight against terrorism and in promoting the conditions for peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Italy supports all diplomatic initiatives, such as the Kabul process, aimed at improving cooperation. We also share the goal of fostering a national consensus around peace reconciliation, which will require the active and inclusive participation of all sectors of Afghan society, including women, whose role is of particular significance in that regard. To that end, we encourage the full implementation of the national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security.

Equally important in the process of achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan is for the Government and its institutions to gain the full confidence of the citizens of the country by exercising good governance and by meeting the country's development needs. This is all the more critical given the alarming levels of poverty and unemployment, especially among young people. That will require the full and comprehensive implementation of internal reform. We acknowledge the substantial progress made in the electoral process, but several important issues need to be resolved in order to ensure that the upcoming elections are fully transparent and credible. The fight against corruption must be carried forward with steadfast determination. We acknowledge that positive results are beginning to emerge in that regard through the action of such institutions as the Office of the Attorney General and the Anti-Corruption Justice Centre.

Promoting and defending women's rights will continue to be a top priority, as is the full empowerment of women within Afghani society. Further efforts are required to ensure that there is no risk of reversal in this area.

The upcoming meeting of senior officials in Kabul will provide an important opportunity to measure progress against reform benchmarks in the framework of a partnership between Afghanistan and its donors, which was reaffirmed at the Brussels Conference last year. The international community's commitment to helping to bring peace, stability and self-reliance to Afghanistan and its people remains steadfast, and Italy is determined to continue to play an integral part in this process.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The delegation of Senegal would like to begin by welcoming the participation of His Excellency Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Afghanistan, in today's meeting, as well as his positive contribution thereto. In addition, my delegation would like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and his team, for the outstanding work they are doing in the field to help Afghans find their way, but also with the prospect of implementing the recommendations of the UNAMA strategic review, decided upon by the Security Council.

Like previous speakers, the Senegalese delegation is also concerned that the security situation in the country remains difficult, with the intensification of armed clashes and suicide attacks, which, according to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/783), have increased by 5 per cent compared to the same period last year, resulting in a large number of casualties, mostly women and children.

At the same time, the political atmosphere seems increasingly tense, in particular given the announcement of the upcoming parliamentary and local district council elections, to be held in July 2018. To make the situation more complicated, terrorist organizations such as Da'esh take advantage of that environment in order to deepen their roots in the territory by engaging in all kinds of criminal activities, including drug trafficking. Nonetheless, we can welcome the long but continued improvement in the cooperation relationship with neighbouring countries and the ongoing support for Afghanistan from the international community, including the United Nations and its Security Council through UNAMA.

Given the sheer human cost of the conflict in Afghanistan, Senegal strongly condemns attacks against civilians. Let me repeat that most of the victims of those attacks are women and children. We would like to pay tribute to all of the health workers, humanitarian workers and coalition soldiers who continue working in Afghanistan, sometimes at the cost of their lives. In that regard, the protection of women deserves special attention. That is why Senegal is launching an appeal to donors to enhance their support for the Afghan national plan of action for women and peace and security.

We reaffirm the urgent need to protect schools, hospitals and places of worship, which have been the main targets of suicide attacks, in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law. I would like to welcome the launch of a national inquiry on the protection of the rights of victims of armed conflict and terrorism by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, as well as to say that we need to pay careful attention to their conclusions.

The difficult situation in Afghanistan raises the key issues of security sector reform, strengthening the operational capacities of the Afghan armed forces, addressing the challenge of corruption, improving military command and aligning military operations with long-term political objectives. The work of UNAMA is crucial in that regard, and the reform is all the more important as the Afghan forces are facing a reduction in the number of troops because of numerous desertions and recruitment difficulties. In that context, it is encouraging to note the decision taken at the most recent meeting of NATO Defence Ministers to increase the number of troops deployed in the Resolute Support Mission as well as the choice made by United States President Donald Trump to keep United States forces in Afghanistan in the framework of the new American strategy in the country.

As is the case in the majority of countries in conflict, security and stability in Afghanistan will depend upon its relations with its neighbouring countries for a long time to come. Senegal is therefore pleased by the continued improvement in cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, in particular through implementing crisis-management mechanisms for emergency communication, as well as finalizing an agreement on carrying out operations along the border. Also included in this positive dynamic is the cooperation with Central Asian countries, including in the areas of transport and communications, as well as with the Islamic Republic of Iran for the conclusion of a strategic cooperation agreement.

All those positive developments will allow UNAMA to better focus on its mandate of supporting Afghan stakeholders so as to build together a safe and stable Afghanistan through dialogue and political efforts, in particular during the period of upcoming elections for 2018. The bold reforms undertaken by the Afghan Government lead us to remain hopeful in that regard.

Mr. Zambrana (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia is grateful to Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan Yamamoto for his excellent briefing, and we take this opportunity to express our firm support to him in carrying out the work that has been entrusted him. We also welcome His Excellency Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, and thank him for the information he has provided.

On the political front, we acknowledge the efforts of the Government and the people of Afghanistan in taking the electoral process forward, which will allow them to strengthen their democratic institutions, and we reiterate our commitment to upholding its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We recall the interconnected nature of the challenges facing Afghanistan and sustainable progress in terms of security, development and governance, which are mutually reinforcing. We stress the Government's resolve to implement its four-year plan on security sector reform aimed at increasing the capability of Afghan security forces despite the current difficulties involved in sustaining them.

We believe that strengthening and unifying the security forces are key elements to combating the threat of destabilization and, above all, the barbarity of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, whose attacks and criminal acts we condemn in the strongest terms possible. Unfortunately, there was evidence during the reporting period under review of a clear increase in the number of attacks against civilian installations, such as schools and training centres, as well as attacks against medical and humanitarian personnel and medical facilities. Between January and August alone, 86 incidents were recorded, doubling the total number of incidents reported for all of 2016, which stood at 41. In that regard, Bolivia reiterates in the strongest terms its condemnation of all terrorist acts as criminal and

unjustifiable, wherever, whenever and by whomever they the are committed.

Moreover, according to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/783), random constraints have been placed on the deployment of a humanitarian assistance by various parties to the conflict, and 214 incidents have been registered since January that cost the lives of 12 aid and medical workers. In that regard, we reiterate to the parties and those involved in the conflict that they must allow and ensure security and safety of civil and humanitarian installations and their staff, while avoiding identifying them as military targets, for whatever reason, and observing the principles of international humanitarian law.

I would be remiss if I did not express our concern about the high number of internally displaced persons, which, according to the report of the Secretary-General, increased to more than 32,000 individuals during the period under review. That figure adds to the more than 200,000 new internally displaced persons worldwide this year. We call for the pooling of efforts to support the return of citizens and their sustainable reintegration to their countries of origin. Accordingly, international organizations must provide concrete support for Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons so as to facilitate their voluntary and safe return.

We commend the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) for the work that it continues to carry in Afghanistan by providing education and training in transit centres so as to ensure that refugees returning to their places of origin are aware of the presence and the danger of anti-personnel landmines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war. Nevertheless, the continued risk represented by anti-personnel mines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices found on the ground have been reflected in the increase in the number of victims as compared with last year's statistics. Consequently, we call for the urgent implementation of resolution 2365 (2017) and for the continued support of UNMAS in the removal of those explosive devices, which pose a threat to the security of the civilian population.

Bolivia is grateful to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for the work that it has carried out in providing logistical and technical support for the Afghanistan-led process, while supporting democratic and governmental initiatives to bring about a peaceful settlement to the conflict. We reiterate the crucial importance of promoting regional cooperation as an effective way to promote security, stability and economic and social development in Afghanistan. We also wish to express our deep gratitude and appreciation for the work and carried out by various United Nations agencies throughout in providing humanitarian assistance in such a difficult context given the high risk involved in realizing their work.

Lastly, we convey our support for the political dialogue under way in Kabul and reiterate that there is no military solution to the situation. On the contrary, that dialogue must be an inclusive process led by and for the Afghan people.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as the representative of Ethiopia.

We express our appreciation to Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing on the latest report (S/2017/783) of the Secretary General on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We would like to thank the Secretary-General for the report, which highlights the key political and security challenges facing Afghanistan. We are pleased to have the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan with us and to having had the opportunity to listen to him.

We take note of the new political dynamic emerging in the political and security sphere, particularly with respect to the consolidation of authority within the National Unity Government and the consensus reached on various issues, such as on high-level appointments, between President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah. We also recognize the progress made by the Afghan Government on its reform agenda, particularly in the areas of anti-corruption activities — without understating existing complications concerning the political situation.

Political temperatures will certainly rise during the next several months leading up to parliamentary and district council elections in July 2018, which were announced by the Independent Election Commission. It is encouraging that many opposition groups are motivated to take part in the upcoming election. It will be absolutely important to establish the necessary political atmosphere for the holding of peaceful and credible elections. One hopes that the security situation will not be a major obstacle to achieving that goal. What the country is facing in that area is indeed formidable.

As the Secretary-General has said, the lack of progress in negotiations between the Government and Taliban remains a serious challenge. Conditions in rural areas cannot be overlooked, where the Taliban appears to have ratcheted up its activities. We appreciate UNAMA's efforts to continue formal dialogue with the Taliban and with three other local peace initiatives to seek a political solution to the continued conflict. No doubt, the long-term security and stability of Afghanistan can be ensured only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led, Afghan-owned political process. We agree with the Secretary-General that a regional environment conducive to an Afghan-led peace process is indeed essential. The role of the countries of the region is also very critical in creating the necessary conditions for the fight against terrorism and the advancement of peace efforts. In that regard, we take note of the bilateral and multilateral engagement by the Afghan Government with neighbours and other countries of the region. The promotion of regional cooperation would certainly advance peace, security and development in Afghanistan and in the region. We also take note of the incremental progress made with Pakistan. We hope that it will be strengthened further.

Afghanistan faces enormous security, social and economic challenges and, without continued inclusive economic growth and development, sustained peace and security cannot be achieved. That is why there is the need to support the Government's continued efforts to determine its development priorities in 10 national priority programmes for 10 sectors, as envisioned in the Afghanistan national peace and development framework. The efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in the promotion of peace, reconciliation, dialogue and support for the development efforts of Afghanistan, with full respect for the country's sovereignty, as well as the leadership and ownership of the Afghan Government, remains very important.

Let me conclude by expressing support and solidarity with the Afghan Government in its difficult task of addressing the country's multiple challenges with a view to promoting peace, reconciliation and development. I also wish to express our appreciation to UNAMA for its continued role in support of those endeavours, as well as for efforts in carrying out its mandate under difficult circumstances.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): Let me start by thanking the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/783) and his Special Representative Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing today.

Pakistan shares the universal concern regarding the grave situation in Afghanistan. The Secretary-General's report highlights the fact that the Afghan people continue to face a deteriorating political, economic and security situation in their country. The Government's inability to control the narcotics trade and arms smuggling is compounding the situation. It is with deep regret that I am obliged to reject the insinuations made by the Afghan Foreign Minister directed at my country. The fundamental sources of insecurity in Afghanistan lie inside the country, not outside. The Afghan Government would therefore be better advised to focus more seriously on its persistent challenges and embark on a path of course correction, rather than blaming others.

The Secretary-General's report refers to Da'esh and its expanding reach in Afghanistan, including in Kunar and Nangarhar provinces. It also talks of its increased influence in the northern and western provinces. These are worrying signs for Afghan security and for regional stability, particularly for Afghanistan's immediate neighbours. As the Afghan Government itself has acknowledged, more than 20 terrorist organizations are operating from its soil, including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, otherwise known as TTP, and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JUA). Those organizations are conducting terrorist attacks inside my country and pose a threat to Afghanistan's other neighbours.

Wars and turmoil in Afghanistan over the past four decades have afflicted and infected our region with extremism and terrorism. Apart from the people of Afghanistan, it is Pakistan that has borne the brunt of it all. Terrorism, the arms and drug trade and the influx of millions of Afghan refugees have undermined my country's security and retarded our economic growth and development. Pakistan has a vital stake in building peace and security in Afghanistan. We have supported, and will continue to support, all regional and international efforts to promote a peaceful settlement to the internal conflict in Afghanistan.

For its part, Pakistan has fought a very successful war against terrorism. Our military operations, the largest anti-terrorism campaign anywhere in the world,

involving over 200,000 of our troops, have crushed and eliminated terrorist groups in our frontier regions and in our towns and cities. We have paid a heavy price. In all, 27,000 civilians and soldiers have been martyred, 50,000 injured — many of them maimed for life. Our economic losses over the past several years are estimated at $120 billion.

Unfortunately, Pakistan continues to face terrorist attacks from across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, which are conducted by the TTP, the JUA and Islamic State-related groups, operating from sanctuaries and safe havens in Afghanistan. We urge the Afghan Government and coalition forces to take decisive action to eliminate terrorist safe havens in Afghanistan. Pakistan is undertaking steps to strengthen border controls and end sponsored terrorist attacks against my country. We expect the Afghan Government and coalition forces to extend full cooperation in ensuring an end to cross-border attacks from Afghanistan into my country.

The Secretary General has affirmed the strong international consensus that there is no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. A peace process between the Afghan Government and the Afghan insurgency must be promoted and fully supported. An intra-Afghan dialogue can succeed only if the Afghan Government itself endorses the global consensus that peace can be achieved only through negotiations and not by the force of arms. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan can play a critical role in forging that consensus in Kabul.

Pakistan also calls upon the Taliban to abandon violence and agree to resume talks in one or more negotiating forums. An agreed de-escalation of the conflict and a negotiated settlement offers the best chance to end the suffering of the Afghan people and to restore peace and tranquillity within Afghanistan and the region. However, as my Prime Minister stated in the General Assembly last week (see A/72/PV.14), what Pakistan is not prepared to do is to fight the Afghan war on my country's soil. We cannot endorse any strategy that has repeatedly failed in the past and would only prolong and intensify the suffering of the people of Afghanistan, as well as further destabilize the region.

We believe that the strategy to restore peace in Afghanistan should focus on the following three elements. First, there must be a coordinated effort to contain and defeat Da'esh and Al-Qaida and their associates, including the TTP, the JUA, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Secondly, Afghanistan must promote a sustained dialogue between the Afghan Government and the Afghan Taliban and other insurgents willing to negotiate a peaceful settlement. Thirdly, effective measures must be taken to prevent cross-border attacks by terrorists and militants travelling from or to Afghanistan.

Pakistan remains committed to extending all possible assistance to our Afghan brothers and sisters, including by facilitating the transit of Afghanistan's imports and exports through our ports, helping with the construction of infrastructure projects through the utilization of the $500 million commitment we made in Brussels and by extending our assistance to the Afghan forces in securing their country. We believe that the meeting last week here in New York between the Foreign Ministers of our two countries opens a window of opportunity to work together to address both security and economic issues to our mutual benefit.

The bonds of religion, culture, history and geography that bind the peoples of Pakistan and Afghanistan are strong and immutable. They will survive the episodes of external intervention and external manipulation. Pakistan has struggled together with the Afghan people to uphold their freedom from foreign occupation and intervention. We strongly support Afghanistan's sovereignty. We strongly oppose its use in games of geopolitical power. While others can afford to orchestrate a proxy war to destabilize Afghanistan and its neighbours, for Pakistan a stable Afghanistan is vital for its own peace, stability and for our progress.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I align myself with the statement to be made later by the observer of the European Union.

I join others in thanking the Secretary-General for his detailed and thorough report (S/2017/783). Let me also thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his dedicated work and Foreign Minister Rabbani, via Ambassador Saikal, for his statement.

Let me also underline the points made by my Italian colleague, especially that on governance, in the

context of our split term in the Security Council in 2017 and 2018.

I will focus on three issues during this debate: security, our commitment and the review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

My first point concerns the security situation in Afghanistan and regional cooperation. We express appreciation for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces; they bear the brunt of keeping Afghanistan safe and secure. The fact that the security situation in Afghanistan is nevertheless getting worse is worrying. We have seen an increase in human rights violations, civilian casualties and the number of internally displaced persons, which are all a result of insufficient stability.

Therefore, if Afghanistan is to prosper, continued work on stabilization is crucial in our view. Stabilization, peace and reconciliation can only be achieved through a political process with committed actors. Being committed entails refraining from supporting elements that hamper the peace process and form impediments to stability in Afghanistan and the region. We encourage advances in the peace process through the greater engagement of insurgent groups in serious and direct peace talks with the Afghan Government. Notably, we commend President Ghani for engaging in talks, notably with the Pakistani Government.

My second point concerns our continuing commitment to Afghanistan. The Kingdom of the Netherlands remains committed to supporting the development of Afghanistan. We make an annual financial contribution of around €60 million, which is focused on the re-establishment of legal order and security, in accordance with Afghanistan's national priorities. We urge the Afghan Government to intensify its efforts in needed reforms and to continue to work extensively with international and national civil society organizations. Such organizations can help to implement those commitments.

Furthermore, the Kingdom reiterates the importance of the inclusion of women and youth in the peace process, which was a point also highlighted by the representative of Sweden. We applaud the inclusion of an additional eight women in the High Peace Council and the establishment of a youth consultation board. Moreover, we welcome President Ghani's personal commitment to gender equality as a top priority for his Government.

That brings me to my third point — the strategic review of UNAMA. We thank the Secretary-General for his substantial report on the strategic review of UNAMA (S/2017/696) and for his recommendations regarding the future of the Mission. We express our deep appreciation of the work of UNAMA and we value the broad United Nations presence throughout the country. A strong presence in its provinces should be maintained. The Kingdom of the Netherlands agrees with the Secretary-General that Afghanistan is indeed not a post-conflict country. Therefore, the first priority for the international community in supporting Afghanistan remains supporting peace and stability. As you just said in your national capacity, Sir, it should be an Afghan-led peace process. Within that context, let me stress the importance of further improving donor coordination by UNAMA. A decisive plan is needed to guide the interaction between donors, United Nations institutions and civil society.

Let me also highlight one area in which the Kingdom of the Netherlands has particular interest, given our own efforts — strengthening the rule of law in Afghanistan. The strategic review recommends the abolishment of the rule-of-law unit within UNAMA. In our view, that should be conducted only if rule-of-law expertise is well integrated into the UNAMA Political Affairs Division. As an integral part of the political pillar of the Mission, in our view, a focus on the impact of rule-of-law projects must be guaranteed.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of the Netherlands has been a long-term partner of Afghanistan — a partner for peace, justice and development. We remain committed to supporting Afghanistan in a decade of ever-increasing Afghan ownership and leadership. In that spirit of partnership, the Afghan people can count on us to stand by their side. During our membership of the Council in 2018, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to support Afghanistan with that same vision, commitment and partnership.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Blanchard (Canada) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council. Canada thanks the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Yamamoto, for his insightful briefing.

Canada fully endorses the statement of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, but I would add some

additional points. I wish to start by addressing certain key aspects of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) strategic review.

First and foremost, the review highlighted that Afghanistan, as noted by the representative of the Netherlands, is not a post-conflict country. Rather, it is a country in conflict, with few signs of abating. There is also spreading extremism throughout the region, which is supported by criminal networks and income from opium production. In 2017, fighting in Afghanistan has intensified, taking an unacceptable toll on the civilian population. The strategic review also found that population growth and urbanization are contributing to a growing number of unemployed youth, who may be at risk of radicalization. It also found that poverty is increasing and corruption continues to undermine public confidence in the Government. Although there has been significant progress in Afghan women's rights, women remain unequal partners compared to men.

In the light of those challenges, Canada supports the implementation of several recommendations of the strategic review that will contribute to the peace process. For their part, the Afghan Government and the armed opposition, including the Taliban, must engage in peace negotiations. Regional and international actors must also support the common interest in regional stability and the creation of conditions for peace. We also need to continue support for essential services to Afghans, leading to self-reliance and sustainable peace. To support public confidence, it is vital that the parliamentary elections in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019 go forward as planned.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada fully supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. It is my hope that the Kabul peace process will bear fruit and that Afghanistan will soon be free of the level of violence we have seen of late in the country. Furthermore, women's participation in the peace and reconciliation process is essential. The strategic review states that it is essential to continue to prioritize the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the promotion of gender quality and the elimination of violence against women.

Canada commends the decision to move the post of Senior Gender Adviser to the Office of the Special Representative. We hope that this move will support the meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and political processes, as well as improve the representation of women in governance structures. If peace, security and development are to take root and endure in Afghanistan, women must join men at the centre of decision-making at all levels of Afghan politics, society and economy.

Finally, I must reiterate Canada's deep concern over the continuing deterioration of security in Afghanistan, especially the increase in civilian and aid worker casualties reported so far in 2017. We are dismayed by that trend. Civilian displacement, increased vulnerability and high civilian casualties are unacceptable. We are particularly concerned about the impact of instability and insecurity of women and children. We look to Afghanistan's neighbours and partners to continue working with the Government of Afghanistan to increase regional stability and decrease violence within the country.

We also want to encourage UNAMA, the Government of Afghanistan, its neighbours and the international community to work even more closely together to ensure the development of basic infrastructure and access to energy. That would make a real difference to the people of Afghanistan, the stability of the region and its security. Canada stands with the Afghan people, especially Afghan women and girls, as they strive for a more secure, prosperous and peaceful future.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): Let me begin by thanking the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Mr. Yamamoto, for his comprehensive briefing, and both him and his staff for their tireless efforts.

Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Afghanistan continues to require our joint and dedicated attention. Germany remains fully committed to its support of the Afghan people, without artificial timelines.

Long-term stability in the region can be achieved only through a comprehensive peace and reconciliation process. We agree with the conclusions outlined in the report (S/2017/696) on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which underscore that the Mission must prioritize political stability and the creation of an environment conducive to reaching an Afghan-owned

peace agreement. Sustainable solutions can be attained only by bringing together all instruments of conflict resolution and prevention in a coherent political strategy. That is in line with the sustaining peace approach and the Secretary-General's current reform efforts, which Germany strongly supports. It has to come together in a coherent, well-coordinated way.

Achieving durable peace is the only way to end the suffering of the Afghan people. When citing the sad statistics of civilian casualties, we must not forget that behind every statistic lies a personal tragedy. Even more needs to be done to protect the most vulnerable in Afghan society. We expect that the national policy on civilian casualty prevention and mitigation will be implemented quickly.

We condemn the suicide attacks on Shia mosques in Herat on 1 August and Kabul on 25 August, which were carried out right before the holy Islamic feast of Eid al-Adha and left over 110 people dead. Those attacks clearly aim to cause division along social, ethnic and religious lines within Afghan society, and we call on all Afghan citizens not to give in to such provocations but to stand united to face terrorist threats.

The Independent Election Commission's announcement to schedule the overdue parliamentary and district council elections for 7 July 2018 is a very important step. The holding of transparent, fair and credible elections is an indispensable component for a peaceful and stable future in Afghanistan. Conflicts need to be resolved in Parliament, not on the battleground. But that can be achieved only when there is trust in the electoral system. Germany stands ready to assist Afghanistan in that process and encourages the National Unity Government to proceed with outstanding electoral reforms.

Let me conclude by reiterating Germany's full support for the crucial role played by UNAMA and United Nations agencies working in Afghanistan. We welcome the results of the strategic review, which seek to optimize the structure of UNAMA and strengthen the Mission even further. We recommend swift implementation. Germany welcomes the decision to retain the UNAMA field presence in Afghanistan, as it is one of the most visible manifestations of UNAMA's and our joint commitment to the Afghan people. Following the withdrawal of the Police Advisory Unit, the Rule of Law Unit and the Military Advisory Unit, Germany trusts that the important tasks of those units will be fully integrated into UNAMA's core activities.

As Chair of the International Contact Group on Afghanistan, Germany especially commends UNAMA's efforts to help strengthen cohesion among international and regional stakeholders in Afghanistan. Germany remains committed to supporting Afghanistan, in close cooperation with the Afghan Government and our international partners, and commends efforts to foster regional and international cooperation in support of peace under the umbrella of the so-called Kabul process.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): We too thank Special Representative Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing and His Excellency Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, for his statement.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2017/783) and his report (S/2017/696) on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

We commend the role played by UNAMA in standing with the Afghan people and in coordinating the efforts of international stakeholders. We will continue to support UNAMA's activities and efforts in that regard.

The achievements of the past 15 years in Afghanistan need to be consolidated. Therefore, the continued support of the international community during the transformation decade is crucial. The international community reiterated its support to Afghanistan in the NATO Warsaw Summit and in the Brussels Conference last year. It is vital to live up to the commitments made towards Afghanistan.

The deteriorating security situation and the presence of Da'esh in the country continue to be a source of concern. We applaud the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces for their determined stance against terrorism. We acknowledge the sacrifices they have made. Turkey will continue to support the Government of Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism and in its efforts to bring peace, security and stability to the country.

We attach importance to the functioning of the National Unity Government. Unity among every

segment of the Afghan society is the key to the success of our endeavours to achieve peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. Further fragmentation of the Afghan society would be detrimental both to the efforts of the Afghan Government and the interests of the international community.

We are pleased to see that the United States new strategy for Afghanistan clearly demonstrates that Afghanistan will not be alone in its fight against terrorism. We are also pleased to note that the new strategy includes prospects for a political settlement, which might include Taliban elements.

Increased cooperation among the countries of the region is imperative for Afghanistan's success. We firmly believe that such cooperation can be secured only through dialogue and stronger engagement. In fact, it is the region itself that has the greatest role, interest and responsibility in establishing and sustaining a secure, prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan.

Turkey will maintain its contributions to the security and development of Afghanistan, as well as its support to the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace efforts. Our support to the Afghan Government's security and development efforts will continue, including through multilateral platforms, such as the Heart of Asia — Istanbul Process.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to express my appreciation to Ethiopia for convening today's debate, the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan for his statement, and Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing on the Secretary-General's most recent report, as contained in document S/2017/783.

As the Secretary-General observed during his first visit to Kabul, peace and security remain the challenges to establishing stability and to ensuring sustained development in Afghanistan. According to the Secretary-General's most recent report, the conflict has continued unabated throughout the country. More than 16,290 security-related incidents were recorded during the first eight months of the year, representing a 3 per cent increase against the same period in 2016 and yet another unfortunate highest total ever recorded since 2001. More than a decade after its invasion, Afghanistan, the region and the world are not any safer. I must reiterate once again that deteriorating security in Afghanistan has deeper roots and cannot be addressed solely through military build-up, as some suggest.

The Taliban and the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant — Khorasan Province continue their heinous attacks on the civilian population. They are reinforcing, recruiting and undertaking complex attacks, such as the attacks on a Shia mosque in Herat on 1 and 25 August that killed over 90 and 28 people, respectively or the August attack in Sari Pul province in which at least 36 people were killed. Like in Herat, the majority of the documented casualties were Shia.

The proliferation of terrorist groups in the Afghan territory necessitates a concerted international effort on counter-terrorism. The world needs to deal with this increasing threat in a comprehensive manner. The international community needs to sustain its support for the Afghan National Unity Government and to help the Government in its fight against terrorism and extremism, as well as in its efforts to address the complex security, political, economic and development challenges it faces.

Our support for the Afghan National Unity Government is unrelenting. We welcome any achievement on the path towards an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process, leading to lasting and comprehensive peace in the country and the region. Iran is indeed very eager to see a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan as its neighbour; security in Afghanistan directly and indirectly affects security in our borders and the region. It was in that context that Iran welcomed and participated in both the Moscow and the Kabul peace conferences this year, and continues its participation in the meetings of the Heart of Asia process as an active member.

Strengthening our regional cooperation with Afghanistan is a priority and a major pathway towards consolidating peace and economic development and stability in the region. The Trilateral Chabahar agreement between Iran, India and Afghanistan and the Khaf-Herat railway project are two major transit projects under way. We are confident that these projects have the capacity to change the regional economic perspectives of Afghanistan. Such regional infrastructure initiatives can serve as an important path towards development and stability in Afghanistan.

We also continue our active role through mechanisms such as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. During the reporting period, we restarted negotiations on our bilateral comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement with the Afghan Government, which aims to improve cooperation in the areas of security, the economy, refugees, culture and education. The first meeting of five technical committees was convened in Tehran to discuss all issues.

On anti-narcotics efforts, we see any increase in narcotics as a reflection of the prevailing insecurity and poverty. Iran is a frontline country in the war against narcotics, we have offered alternative cultivation and alternative livelihood plans to dissuade Afghan farmers from cultivating opium. Stronger international cooperation and support, and the commitment of donors, the Afghan authorities and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime are essential to deterring the menace of narcotics as a social health challenge and, more importantly, as a major source of income for the recruitment of extremist and terrorist groups. In that regard, we underline the positive impact of strengthened regional cooperation and joint responses to countering illicit drugs and transnational organized crime.

Iran has hosted hundreds of Afghan refugees for more than three decades. They have access to mostly subsidized services that are equally available to Iranians, including basic commodities and public services. This year too, 100,000 Afghan children, regardless of their or their parent's legal status, were able to enrol in our schools. By the decree issued today by the Supreme Leader, no Afghan child in Iran, not even an illegal immigrant, should be deprived of education, and schools must enrol them.

We also continue to participate in the work of Tripartite Commission in order to plan for the voluntary, safe, dignified and gradual repatriation of Afghan refugees. Success in voluntary repatriation will depend first and foremost on providing for the reasonable needs of repatriated refugees in Afghanistan, and underscores the need for more international support. Stronger coordinated approach between the Government, donors and the United Nations and an overall strategy for addressing the combined needs of the displaced and returnees are crucial in making the repatriation of Afghan refugees more successful.

We support UNAMA and United Nations agencies in their efforts to provide development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan through a genuine commitment of the United Nations to a sustained partnership with Afghanistan. We need to utilize the UNAMA mandate and its good offices to strengthen national institutions and capacities in priority areas, as requested by the Government.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I thank you, Sir, for organizing this debate on the situation in Afghanistan and for providing us with an opportunity on an issue that forms a very important part of the peace and security debate in the Security Council. We thank Ambassador Yamamoto for his reflections on the current situation.

We were happy to hear the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan address the Council earlier today. We welcomed Mr. Rabbani in Delhi earlier this month for the second meeting of the India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Council. For India, strategic partnership and friendship with Afghanistan are an article of faith. Ours is not just another relationship or engagement, but a spiritual and civilizational connect. As a friend of Afghanistan, India supports Minister Rabbani's appeal to the international community to support his country in strengthening the gains made by the Afghan people over the past 15 years.

On its part, India has just launched a new development partnership with Afghanistan. We will begin implementing high-impact projects all across Afghanistan using the fresh development assistance of $1 billion announced last year. We will focus on building infrastructure for socioeconomic development, enhancing the capacities and capabilities of institutions of governance, and promoting the skills and capacities of human resources. We welcome and support the announcement by Minister Rabbani of Afghanistan's candidature for the Human Rights Council elections to be later this year. The worst violations of human rights are caused by terrorism, and the people of Afghanistan have endured that for too long.

We have taken note of the report (S/2017/696) of the Secretary-General on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We have also noted the reflections of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and welcome his findings, especially those on the political aspect of the Mission in Afghanistan. Further, we welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General

to address the shortcomings in the functioning of UNAMA, which remains the biggest special political mission of the United Nations in any country. We hope that it will strengthen the supportive role of the United Nations so as to enhance its performance in all areas of its mandate. This work must be implemented with regular consultations with the Afghan Government. We look forward to consulting with relevant actors in that process and to assisting in it whenever required.

While undertaking our collective efforts here at the United Nations or at other multilateral settings, we must be mindful to support the strengthening of Afghanistan's sovereignty and stability, which are the two things that anti-Government terrorist elements are trying to undermine from their safe havens across the borders of Afghanistan. What Afghanistan needs is not prescriptions but support for its efforts. The people of Afghanistan should decide what they need and what they want to do. Whether they relate to Afghanistan's political and military engagement with its partners or to the differences in its political establishment, the solutions and the approach must be driven by the Afghans and by Afghans alone.

The situation in Afghanistan has remained particularly painful and disturbing, with the security situation worsening and visible signs of that the gains made by the international community and Afghan people are being undermined. The incessant attacks on hospitals, schools, funerals, international development agencies and diplomatic missions are a matter of serious concern. The multiple crises that have been inflicted on Afghanistan have made Afghan territory attractive for criminal and terrorist groups, which are well connected to international terror and criminal networks. These groups are stealing the resources of Afghanistan, which ought to belong to the people of the country. The international community's first and foremost duty is to ensure that the forces of terrorism and extremism do not find sanctuaries and safe havens anywhere and at any level. We must not differentiate between good and bad terrorists, or play one group off against the other. The Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Al-Qaida, Da'esh, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and others of their ilk are all terrorist organizations, many of them proscribed by the United Nations. They should be treated like terrorist organizations, with no justifications offered for their activities.

We support Afghanistan's determination to overcome its security challenges, and the willingness of many in the international community to effectively deal with the issue of safe havens enjoyed by the terrorist organizations that pose a threat to the region and beyond. For its part, the Security Council must act on the funds that the terrorists in Afghanistan are generating through their illicit activities. In that regard, we would like the Council to consider how the sanctions regime established under resolution 1988 (2011) can be utilized also to leverage progress in the peace process. These are significant instruments and must be utilized to their full capacity.

We once again thank you, Mr. President, for your efforts and look forward to more such opportunities to be able to help our Afghan friends in their endeavour to find peace and stability in their land.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Wilson: (Australia) welcomes the recommendations of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) strategic review, on which I will focus my comments today. The review points the way to making the United Nations effort in Afghanistan more strategic, agile, coherent and focused. The international community has spent much of 2017 reflecting on the effectiveness of its approaches in Afghanistan and made some significant adjustments to emphasise the primacy of getting to peace.

While noting the implementation challenges, Australia supports proposals to restructure the work of the United Nations Mission under political, development and human rights pillars to better enable UNAMA to pursue its ultimate goals of sustainable peace and self-reliance in Afghanistan. Australia calls on the wider United Nations family in Afghanistan to work constructively and coherently towards enabling and participating in that vision.

Australia supports an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process. We encourage Afghanistan to continue its efforts, with support from the United Nations, to build the conditions conducive to peace, including political consensus and inclusion.

Regional countries have a crucial role to play in supporting any peace settlement, the benefits of which will ultimately accrue not just to Afghanistan but to its neighbours as well. The review's observation that the international consensus that drove early success is fraying should move us to renew our commitment to

securing peace in and for the region. We encourage our friends in the region to prioritize long-term strategic stability over short-term tactical advantage.

Australia commends the proposal to retain a significant UNAMA field presence. We emphasize the importance of field offices for outreach, programme implementation and visibility, particularly on human rights concerns and early warning, including of emerging humanitarian needs. More broadly, we support a more prominent role for the United Nations in strengthening donor coordination to better align assistance with Afghanistan's priorities and improve oversight, coordination and coherence.

Australia welcomes bringing the Senior Gender Adviser under the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, thereby reflecting the centrality of reaching for gender equality across all lines of effort. Supporting women's empowerment has been a core mission of the Australian aid programme in Afghanistan since 2002. Our ending violence against women programme supports services for women affected by violence, access to justice, community attitude changes and advocates for women's rights. Earlier this year, our Prime Minister announced the $30 million women and girls empowerment package, to fund phase 2 and continue to support Afghan children, predominantly girls in rural and remote areas, to access basic education.

As per the review, Australia recognizes the significant work of United Nations agencies and their staff in Afghanistan and thanks them for their close cooperation as development and diplomatic partners with reach into parts of the country and access to diverse stakeholders critical for Afghanistan's future. We encourage all United Nations agencies in Afghanistan to work together cooperatively to fully implement the UNAMA review.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Dabouis (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States. The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/783), as well as Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing. I would also like to thank and Minister Rabbani for his statement.

(*spoke in English*)

As stated on several occasions, the EU strongly acknowledges the crucial role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people, encouraging peace and reconciliation, monitoring and promoting human rights and in coordinating the international community's assistance. The European Union remains fully committed to supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. Such a process must include all Afghan men and women and must preserve Afghanistan's unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and the equal rights of all Afghans under the Constitution.

The EU supports the Kabul process on peace and security and other international efforts to establish a genuine Afghan peace and reconciliation process. The Kabul process can also encourage further discussions between Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries to increase regional cooperation. We encourage the Afghan Government to engage in a political process with the Taliban and other Afghan opposition groups to reach a lasting political settlement. We also welcome all initiatives to create a conducive environment for such a process and call on all parties to engage in constructive solutions.

On 24 July the joint communiqué adoped on elements for an EU strategy in Afghanistan set our vision on how the European Union can support Afghanistan. It focuses on four priority areas critical to achieving progress in Afghanistan, namely, promoting peace, stability and regional security; reinforcing democracy, the rule of law and human rights and promoting good governance and women's empowerment; supporting economic and human development; andaddressing challenges related to migration.

The joint communiqué follows the Conference on Afghanistan held in Brussels in October 2016, the signing of a new EU-Afghanistan cooperation agreement on partnership and development in February 201 and the appointment of a Special Envoy to Afghanistan in June this year. Next month, the Foreign Ministers are expected to adopt the actions proposed in the joint communiqué. In that context, let me also

refer to the new United States strategy on Afghanistan and South Asia. As in the past, the European Union will continue to work together with the United States and the international community in support of lasting peace, security and stability in Afghanistan.

Ensuring respect for human rights and the holding of democratic elections continue to be a focus of all EU actions in the country. An EU-Afghanistan high-level meeting on human rights took place in Kabul on 14 August, with more than 80 participants. The meeting highlighted next steps to be taken by the Afghan authorities to advance on the protection of human rights. Human rights will from now on be part of the structured dialogue between the European Union and Afghanistan under the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development.

With regard to elections, the EU and its member States welcomed the announcement by the Independent Election Commission of the date for the parliamentary elections in Afghanistan, to be held on 7 July 2018. Joint efforts will now be deployed to make these elections possible on that date in a democratic, inclusive, transparent and credible manner. There is still a lot to be done; in particular, key decisions on electoral reforms have to be taken and implemented by the Afghan authorities in a timely manner. The EU and its member States remain committed to supporting the Afghan electoral process. Recently, the EU adopted a €3.5-million project to strengthen Afghanistan's electoral institutions, which complements the existing and future European Union electoral assistance in Afghanistan.

Joint State-building and development efforts in Afghanistan need to build on reinforced regional cooperation to address both the common threats of terrorism and common sustainable development challenges. In this regard, the EU strongly supports such regional forums as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan to facilitate cooperation among all regional actors.

Migration continued to be a very important subject in our discussions with the Afghan authorities. The EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward on migration issues, complemented by bilateral EU member States arrangements with Afghanistan on migration, is producing good results and we need to continue to jointly pursue and enhance its implementation. Our comprehensive dialogue with Afghanistan includes addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement and ensuring the sustainable reintegration of the returnees. Assistance in this field was strengthened in the past two years with measures to facilitate the sustainable reintegration of returnees and internally displaced persons, socioeconomic cohesion in host and return communities, and the strengthening of the Government's capacity for migration management and fight against human trafficking and smuggling. Since last year, approximately €200 million have been made available to help Afghanistan tackle the challenges related to migration and forced displacement, including with regard to the regional dimension of the situation of Afghan refugees.

In July, UNAMA reported that the number of civilians killed and injured in the Afghanistan conflict during the first six months of 2017 persisted at the same record high levels as last year. Extreme harm to civilians continued amid a worsening toll from suicide attacks and a greater impact on women and children. We call on all parties to do their utmost to protect the civilian population, especially women and children.

We also need to continue to protect the vital role of humanitarian agencies and respect their impartiality and humanitarian space in addressing the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable. In view of the threat posed by the many mines and improvised explosive devices to the population, the European Union also encourages Afghanistan to maintain their current demining rhythm.

(*spoke in French*)

To conclude, the European Union continues to consider UNAMA as a key partner in achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan. UNAMA has an invaluable role to play in ensuring the broadest possible international support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. The European Union will continue to support these efforts with all means at its disposal. In that regard, and as already announced, I note that the newly appointed Special Envoy of the European Union to Afghanistan, Mr. Roland Kobia, has taken up his post. His main task will be to promote the regional consensus for peace and to advance the European Union's contribution to the security, stability and development of Afghanistan and the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium aligns itself with the statement just made by the observer of the European Union. On my part, I would like to highlight the following points.

It is now more crucial than ever to ensure that conditions are conducive to stability and dialogue, and we welcome the efforts made by the Afghan Government to that end. Furthermore, we believe that the regional actors should demonstrate their commitment to peace in Afghanistan and translate these commitments into concrete action.

We welcome the recommendations of the strategic review, which once again underscore the coordination of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) between the various international donors and the Afghan Government. Belgium will closely follow the way in which this recommendation is implemented in practice.

Belgium hopes that the legislative elections will take place as planned in an acceptable security environment and with a satisfactory rate of participation, particularly with regard to women as both voters and candidates.

It is important to ensure that the work carried out by UNAMA takes into account the developing commitments of international partners. The ultimate goal of such partnerships should always be peace and stabilization in Afghanistan, which are the necessary preconditions for the well-being of the Afghan people.

Lastly, I would like to touch on the situation of children in Afghanistan. Three armed groups, as well as the Afghan National Police, are listed as having recruited children. The detention of children is also of concern. As for the Taliban, they are guilty of carrying out attacks on schools and medical facilities. We call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law and encourage the Government to intensify its fight against impunity in the case of violation.

To conclude, I reiterate Belgium's support for Afghanistan and its Government, as well as for UNAMA.

The President: The representative of Afghanistan has asked make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Rabbani (Afghanistan): What we heard earlier today from the representative of Pakistan was but another attempt to divert international attention from its open and explicit support for terrorism and violent extremism. All of us here today are well aware of the security dynamics in Afghanistan and in the region, and I should therefore not have to go into great detail about Pakistan's long-term and long-standing use of terror and violent extremism as an instrument of foreign policy.

The main factor for insecurity in Afghanistan therefore relates directly to the export of violent proxy groups into Afghanistan from within Pakistan. As we stated last week before the General Assembly (see A/72/PV.6), these facts have been verified by various members of the international coalition present in Afghanistan. It is on this basis that Afghanistan has called on the Security Council to take specific action in defence of the Charter of the United Nations.

With all that Afghanistan and Pakistan have in common, as beautifully outlined by the representative of Pakistan, we are keen to see genuine and comprehensive State-to-State discourse on peace, security and prosperity. We hope to see constructive engagement rather than a continuation of the all-too-familiar plausible deniability and various attempts to change the narrative through fake and distorted images, facts and figures. This kind of behaviour will bear no fruit for peace. The policy of deception has no future. Pakistan should instead seize the opportunity to reverse course and choose the path of adhering to the Charter of the United Nations.

The President: The representative of Pakistan has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Usman (Pakistan): We regret that the Afghan Permanent Representative has yet again chosen to criticize Pakistan for its internal problems. We reject such insinuations. Pakistan will not assume the role of scapegoat for the failures of other countries. We call upon the Afghan Government to work with the Government of Pakistan in the same spirit of the recent meeting held for our two Foreign Ministers in order to address security and economic challenges in a mutually beneficial manner.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.